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Preserving  
and  
Sharing  
African  
American  
Family  
History

ILLINOIS DOCUMENTS

JUN 06 1995

ILLINOIS STATE LIBRARY

George H. Ryan  
Secretary of State  
and State Librarian



**H**istory helps people see themselves in the stories of their communities, the record of their thoughts and activities, and their relations with others. It is helpful for all of us to be able to view today's events based on yesterday's experiences.

Since the history and achievements of African Americans have been under-publicized and sometimes misrepresented, it is particularly important to preserve and share documents that reveal the facts and feelings that were left untold. By gathering and sharing diaries, letters, photographs, organizational records and artifacts, African Americans can begin to recreate, honor and illuminate their American journey.

I hope this brochure will encourage you and your relatives to gather and preserve the history of your family and your community—and to share your findings with others.

As you revisit the past, I invite you to explore our state's archives, museums and historic sites for further perspectives. Ask your librarian for information about historic attractions and for books and periodicals that explore the history and culture of African Americans in our state and nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George H. Ryan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the start of the name.

George H. Ryan  
Secretary of State  
and State Librarian

# Preserving History – What You Can Do

## **Storage**

Nearly all families have documents and photographs worth preserving. *Archivists* and *curators* agree that attics and basements are probably the worst places to store important papers and photographs because of the extremes in temperatures and humidity. It is best to store items in cool, dry places in materials that meet standards specified by professional *conservators*. Keeping the environment consistent is important.

## **Labeling Items**

Always record information about a document or photograph, such as names of people in the photograph, date, occasion, and who owned the document or photograph. Write this information on the back of the photograph in pencil only or on a separate sheet of paper.

## **Preservation**

Neither cellophane tape nor photo albums with magnetic pages should be used on documents and photos because they contain chemicals that cause paper and photos to deteriorate. The adhesive used in magnetic albums may also damage photos or documents, especially if someone tries to reposition them. It is best to use photo albums or binders with rings, using page inserts made of *mylar*, not plastic.

Try to store items flat, without folding. Special *acid-free* folders and boxes are available to keep documents and photos flat and protected. Since newspapers become brittle and yellow in a relatively short time, important newspaper articles and clippings should be photocopied on acid free paper.



*Preservation* materials can often be purchased in stationery or camera supply stores or from specialized dealers such as those mentioned at the end of this brochure.

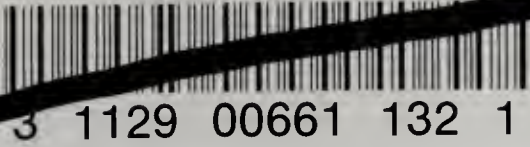
Some items will need special handling. Deteriorated books, paper documents, and photographs may need professional attention. Clothing, ceramics, paintings, quilts and other textiles may also need special handling. Professionals should be consulted before undertaking conservation efforts on delicate items.

### **Start Now**

Caring for a family's *artifacts*, documents and photographs can be an exciting and intriguing pastime, one that can be passed on from one generation to the next. Sometimes, families accumulate so much that the time needed to organize and care for them can seem overwhelming. Occasionally, the next generation is not as interested in the family's history as the current one.

### **Consider Donation**

What should a family do with artifacts, documents and photographs accumulated when family members no longer use and enjoy them? Consider sharing them with others. Usually, the personal papers of "the rich and famous" and government officials are preserved in *archives*. Families may want to donate personal and organizational papers to an appropriate *repository* where they will be preserved and used by scholars and researchers. However, finding a repository usually takes time and effort. Any person wanting to give papers and artifacts to an agency should contact that agency to learn if they are interested in the materials. Information about several Illinois repositories is given at the end of this brochure.



## GLOSSARY

**acid-free** - paper, boxes and storage materials free or acidic substances.

**archive** - a place where public and governmental (and sometimes personal) records are kept.

**artifacts** - things, simple objects made by people.

**conservator** - a person who preserves and protects items from deterioration.

**curator** - a person who takes care of and supervises a collection.

**mylar** - clear, inert material used to protect documents and photographs.

**preservation** - caring for items in a manner that minimizes harm and deterioration.

**restoration** - treating items and materials to make them close to their original state.

**repository** - a place where artifacts, documents, and other items are kept, cared for, and made available to people who want to study or learn from them.

## REPOSITORIES

Libraries, historical societies and museums are examples of repositories that may have the personal papers and artifacts of ordinary people. Prior to making a decision to donate personal or family papers and documents or organizational records to a repository, you will want to talk to and perhaps visit the repository. Among repositories in Illinois that you may want to consider are:

**The Chicago Historical Society**  
**1601 North Clark Street**  
**Chicago, Illinois 60614**  
**(312) 642-4600**

**The DuSable Museum of African American History**  
**740 East 56th Place**  
**Chicago, Illinois 60637**  
**(312) 947-0600**

**Illinois State Historical Library**  
**Old State Capitol**  
**Springfield, Illinois 62701**  
**(217) 524-5939**

**The Newberry Library**  
**60 West Walton Street**  
**Chicago, Illinois 60610**  
**(312) 943-9090**



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**Vivian C. Harsh Research Collection  
Carter G. Woodson Regional Library  
9525 South Halsted Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60628  
(312) 747-6900**

**Your Hometown Library and/or County Historical Society**

## **CONSERVATION SUPPLIES**

Conservation supplies protect your cherished pictures and documents. You can purchase professional quality conservation supplies from:

**Conservation Resources, International, Inc.  
8000-H Forbes Place  
Springfield, Virginia 22151  
(703) 321-7730 Phone  
(703) 321-0629 FAX**

**Gaylord Brothers  
Box 4901  
Syracuse, New York 13221-4901  
(800) 448-6160 Phone  
(800) 272-3412 FAX**

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